

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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STEEL SHOT FOR WATERFOWL HUNTING REPORT FILED

A final environmental statement on the proposed use of steel shot for waterfowl hunting in the United States was filed with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on January 7, 1976. A notice of availability is being published in the Federal Register.

No final decision has been made by Secretary of the Interior Thomas S. Kleppe concerning the use of steel shot. CEQ guidelines require at least 30 days to elapse after publication of the Federal Register notice, prior to a decision. During this period the Secretary will consider the full range of alternatives proposed, as well as any comments received.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed that the traditional lead shotgun shell be banned for waterfowl hunting starting in 1976 in selected areas of the Atlantic Flyway, extending in 1977 to areas of the Mississippi Flyway, and in 1978 to parts of the Central and Pacific Flyways.

In place of lead, steel pellets would be the only type of shot loads permitted for hunting ducks, geese, swans, and coots in specifically designated areas. Other substitutes that industry may develop could be permitted if approved by the Fish and Wildlife Service Director.

The purpose of the proposed ban would be to stop the further buildup of lead shot pellets in areas used by aquatic birds. Some species routinely ingest these pellets and subsequently die from lead poisoning.

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The proposed restriction would be applied only to the hunting of ducks, geese, swans, and coots because it is believed that most of the lead deposited is a result of the hunting of these species. The hunting of other species of aquatic and upland game birds does not appear to be a source of a significant lead poisoning problem.

The proposed steel shot bans are recommended for either statewide or selected areas which would be set by the Service, depending upon the pattern of waterfowl concentrations and hunting in particular regions of the country.

The progressive implementation of the proposed bans over a 3-year period would begin action in the Atlantic Flyway where the problem is most severe. Adequate time would be provided so ammunition manufacturers could perfect production techniques and meet the annual demands for ammunition from hunters nationwide. Manufacturers would also be expected to develop and produce shells for other than 12-gauge shotguns, which is presently the only gauge for which steel shot shells are being produced. Law enforcement components of the Service require time to devise methods for resolving likely enforcement problems before nationwide implementation of the proposed new regulations could begin. Scientists monitoring the lead problem also require time to develop more refined information about lead poisoning in waterfowl and the methods of dealing with it.

The initial draft environmental impact statement on the use of steel shot was issued July 12, 1974. More than 1,000 letters were received in response to the draft, and public hearings were held in four cities across the country.

Minor editing, factual changes, and updating of information in the draft statement were made in the final statement.

The initial proposal to impose these restrictions flyway-wide in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways has been changed in this current recommendation. It now proposes the option of limiting the restrictions to specifically designated hot-spot areas in all four flyways.

The areas would be delineated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in consultation with the States, to provide maximum protection to the affected bird species with minimum restrictions.